

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Lazy J Cross Access Project

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement to Proceed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

The Bitter Root Land Trust is negotiating a conservation easement on the 1,080-acre Lazy J Cross Ranch in the Sula Basin area of southern Ravalli County. The landowners have a tradition of providing public hunting access through FWP's Block Management program, and are interested the possibility of providing perpetual hunting access as part of the conservation easement. FWP has been asked to consider supporting a partnership effort to acquire the conservation easement, thus protecting key winter range and other important habitat, and securing exceptional public hunting access. The Lazy J Cross borders both state land and the Bitterroot National Forest, and offers access to more than 40,000 acres of public land within five miles of the ranch's borders.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Since this is a new proposal before the Commission, no public comment or involvement has been solicited to date. Public involvement through a draft environmental assessment will be sought, pending an endorsement to proceed.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposed Action: FWP proposes to work with the Bitter Root Land Trust, the landowners and other partners to investigate a transaction through which FWP would contribute financially to securing a conservation outcome for the Lazy J Cross Ranch, including permanent public hunting access on and through the ranch property.

No-Action: FWP would forgo the opportunity to partner with the landowner and other entities to evaluate this conservation and access opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends an enforcement to proceed with evaluation and negotiation of an access component of the proposed conservation easement. This important conservation project has the potential to secure outstanding hunter access to the ranch and adjoining public lands in the Bitterroot National Forest and Sula State Forest. If negotiations are successful, FWP will bring the project back to the Commission for final review and approval.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse the recommendation to proceed with negotiations to develop and bring to the Commission a transaction to secure public hunting access rights as part of the proposed Lazy J Cross Conservation Easement.